1: Nimuendajú E-5 (1929-1938) 1946 SO8 Timbira SO8

II. ECOLOGY

Settlements and Houses

361 182 *Settlements.*—One of the most characteristic features of Timbira culture—in the natives' own opinion—is the circular village plan. So long as their aboriginal life retains a spark of vitality they cling to this mode of settlement, which is most intimately bound up with their socioceremonial organization. Notwithstanding their ignorance of Indian usage, the Baptist missionaries in Brazil correctly recognized the social significance of this feature and did their utmost to effect its abandonment; for as long as it survives the ancient social order, too, lives on, and within that there is no place for missionaries. When the Canella transplanted their village to the site of Ponto in 1924, the Indian agent in Barra do Corda likewise tried to convince them that straight streets were far more beautiful, but he had the good sense to desist when the Indians vigorously spurned the proposal.

361 171 114 Snethlage has it that Pereira do Lago ascribes circular villages to the Gamella of Vianna, and Ferreira Gomes to the Krahõ', while Ribeiro is supposed to credit a semilunar form to the Timbira of Goyaz.[116] Actually Pereira merely reports round Gamella *huts*, without saying a word about their arrangement. Ribeiro, on the other hand, after stating that the Timbira encampments and settlements were invariably circular, goes on to say: "Alguns Indios de Goyaz edificam em meias lua." This doubtless refers to the horseshoe shape of Šavánte-Šerénte villages. Finally, Ferreira Gomes, though mentioning circular settlements for the Krẽyé (then still near Imperatriz), never got to see any Krahõ', as he explicitly states: "... tres aldeas de indigenos mansos os quaes não foram vistos por mim .... estes indigenas são de duas nações, caraús e chavantes."[117]

361 183 The village (krĩ) site must fulfill the following conditions:

1. It must be level. Since level ground of adequate extent is hardly to be found on the slope in the direction of the watercourses, the villages are all situated on the level of the steppe, usually at the end of a spur projecting into the angle between two converging streams.

2. The ground should be neither rocky nor sandy, but represent an outcrop of hard clay, for on sand or rubble barefoot folk cannot dance in comfort, especially if they indulge with Timbira perseverance.

3. The site must not be too far from the water supply, though a difference of a kilometer does not matter.

4. There must be an adequate *galeria* forest near by to provide clearings for a number of years. When the annual tree-felling has deforested the land to the distance of, say, twelve kilometers from the village, the settlement is transferred to a new site that has a sufficiency of timber in the vicinity.

5. Finally, attention is paid to freedom from fever, in which respect the Timbira steppes are, as a rule, favorably situated.

361 ● 363 621 Ponto may serve as a typical steppe Timbira settlement. To be sure, its form lacks the geometrical perfection credited to it in Fróes Abreu's plan, and this author likewise fails to indicate that the village is elevated above the plain.[118] In 1930 it comprised thirty-one houses (ikré), all of whose broad sides faced the plaza. The diameter of the circle was 300 m. Along the front façade of the houses there extends all around the plaza a street (krĩkapẽ') of irregular width; it shall henceforth be designated as the "boulevard" (fig. 1). Its minimum width may be set at about 7 m. In front of the houses of the two vụ'tẹ girls (see p. 92), which always lie opposite each other, the boulevard expands into a small dance ground. Because of

[116] Snethlage, Nordostbras. Ind., 152.
[117] Ferreira Gomes, Itinerario, 490, 495.
[118] Fróes Abreu, Terra das Palmeiras, 90, 168.

1: Nimuendaju E-5 (1929-1936) 1946 SO8 Timbira SO8

the incessant dancing and running on this street, not a blade of grass can thrive there; furthermore it is specially cleared for festive occasions.

The central plaza (kạ), some 50 m. in diameter, is also kept free of any growth of grass. It is not a perfect circle either. A radial path (vịrị prị kạra), from 3 to 5 m. in width, which is likewise kept free of grass, at least during the ceremonial season, connects each dwelling with the plaza. On the triangular patches between the radial paths the steppe grass grows unhindered, but no shrubs are tolerated there; and of the timber that once grew on the steppe here a single large tree, a sucupíra, was allowed to stand at the margin of the plaza (see p. 1).

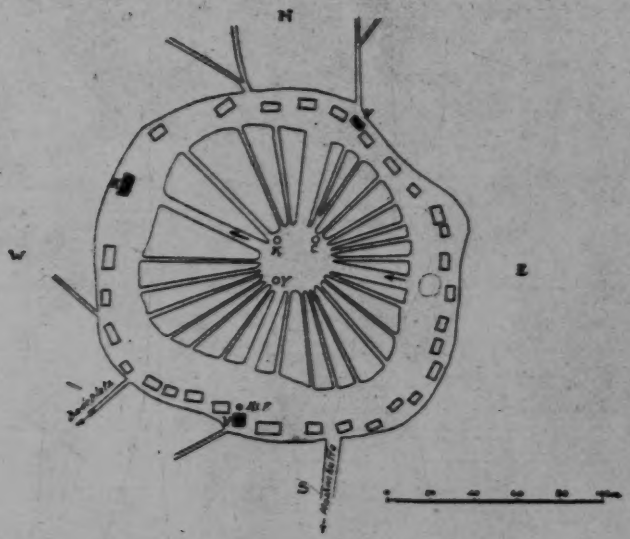

Fig. 1. Plan of Canella village.

More particularly during the ceremonial period, when all the paths and plazas are clean, the village makes a very neat impression. Coming from Barra do Corda, a traveler who had reached the last eminence to the north would see before him a gigantic wheel, as it were, with the Serra do Alpercatas looming picturesquely in the background.

Almost perfectly straight roads (pa'kré) lead out into the steppes in the four cardinal directions, the northern and the eastern ones being the best and the longest. The former is seventeen kilometers in length, not twenty-five to thirty kilometers, as Snethlage reports. These roads, essentially designed as log-race tracks (pl. 1, *c*) are stripped of trees and bushes only on certain occasions—about once every five years; then a space of at least seven meters is cleared. Under ordinary circumstances they serve as highways for Indians and Neobrazilians alike. I have seen such roads also among the Krīkatí, Pụkóbye, and Apạ'nyekra; and they are reported for the Western Gaviões territory (p. 21).

Numerous narrow trails traverse the steppe and the *galeria* forest in all directions, leading to plantations and camp sites frequented on hunting or fishing trips. The paths to the cultivated plots are everywhere comparatively wide and kept